



# AAP Interview: Kimiko Hahn

*Kimiko Hahn is the author of Air Pocket (Hanging Loose Press, 1989), Earshot (HLP, 1992) which was awarded the Theodore Roethke Memorial Poetry Prize and an Association of Asian American Studies Literature Award, The Unbearable Heart (Kaya, 1996), which received an American Book Award, Volatile (HLP, forthcoming, 1998) and Mosquito and Ant (W.W. Norton, forthcoming, 1999). In 1995 she wrote ten portraits of women for a two-hour HBO special entitled Ain't Nuthin But a She-thing. She is a recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New York Foundation for the Arts, as well as a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award. Kimiko Hahn is an Associate Professor in the English Department at Queens College/CUNY.*

Interview by:  
Bryan Thao Worra  
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## **Asian American Press (AAP): Besides your classes, what are you working on right now?**

Kimiko Hahn (KH): I am working on a new manuscript that collects prose pieces (based on the Japanese *zuihitsu*, often translated as a "poetic miscellany") and one-line poems (based on the Japanese *tanka* that are traditionally 31 syllables). The working title is *The Narrow Road to the Interior*, ripped off from Basho's *Okunohosomichi!* At the same time I am trying to write new poems that continue the style and tone from my last book, *The Artist's Daughter*. So the short answer is: revising, writing and revising.

## **AAP: Who's on your reading shelf these days?**

KH: On my shelf for several years is *String of Beads: the poetry of Princess Shikishi*, translated by Hiroaki Sato. Also since visiting Minneapolis, I am reading the new work of Ray Gonzalez and Wang Ping--whose other books I admire. Coincidentally, I've been reading Gray Wolf Press' *After Confession*, edited by Sontag and Graham on and off for over a month--in part to feel part of a discussion and also because I'll probably use the book in a course in the near future.

## **AAP: What draws you to poetry in particular as your means of literary expression?**

KH: The adoration of language. Good prose writers also bathe in language but the line itself slows reading down and calls attention to words, phrases, sounds, cadence--all that words have to offer as a medium. Writing isn't just talking or just expressing. It is a love for the medium itself.



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KH (continued): Further--I tell my students (in literature classes and workshops both) that poetry is art, not an academic exercise. As art it should be an experience. Just as some listen to chamber music or rap and feel moved; as some watch a ballet or stand in front of, say, Picasso's *Guernica*--art should be a physically moving experience.

**AAP: What's been your biggest challenge as a poet?**

KH: I take some pride in plunging into subject matter that might be considered disturbing, or at least discomforting. But I am at the point in my personal life where what is happening around me--besides the threat of terrorism, economic chaos, etc. --is my young adult daughters. As a mother it is my duty to protect them; so the conflict is how to write about some of the things that we experience as a family without compromising them. It is a difficult issue for me.

**AAP: How do you find the time to write between a job and family?**

KH: I am fortunate to have a college teaching position that allows the time and the energy. As part of my teaching literature I have to teach some texts I would not ordinarily study--and that is a good stretch. Lately though I have fallen out of my routine so I need to re-establish my lodging in a coffee shop for a couple hours to read and write. those dirty dishes, student papers, phone--are too distracting.

**AAP: Do you have any words for beginning writers?**

KH: Take risks now. Read a lot.